

A PROTEST.

SIR,—Those librarians who, in the innocence of their hearts, imagined they were doing a public service by addressing a *confidential* circular to a paper called *London*, will now be delighted to learn that in reality they were serving Mr. Alfred Cotgreave, F.R.H.S., of West Ham, a distinguished inventor and compiler of a cyclopædian catalogue as big as the island of Guernsey. The replies to the circular mentioned have been tabulated and printed on a large folio sheet and, after being distributed at Belfast by Mr. Cotgreave, will no doubt in the future form a permanent advertisement of the famous red and blue indicator with which most librarians have been made familiar. As a piece of commercial sharpness, the dodge of getting a number of testimonials under cover of information for a so-called "progressive journal" was clever, but whether it will be considered dignified or proper by those who were fooled into giving opinions, is quite another thing. It is most disgraceful that half the public librarians in Britain should be tricked into gratuitously advertising a piece of library furniture on the pretence that they were assisting in a plebiscite on a question of library management. After this, the action of *London* and those behind it who were responsible for the series of attacks on the Clerkenwell Public Library can be judged with considerable accuracy, and the value of the criticism assessed at its true value.

COUNTRY LIBRARIAN.

CATALOGUE CRITICISM.

SIR,—I cordially agree with everything Messrs. Folkard and Pacy have written on the question of catalogue criticism, and beg to express my earnest hope that you will not discontinue it, though I should like to see it conducted on somewhat different lines. The truth is that the great majority of library catalogues, especially those compiled on the so-called "dictionary" plan for lending libraries, are no better in design than they were twenty years ago, though the idea seems to be widely prevalent that the high-water mark of perfection has been reached. It is, therefore, not only criticism that is wanted, but suggestion and instruction on points in cataloguing which are almost invariably neglected. Your critics have favoured us from time to time with remarks on what Mr. Pacy aptly terms "microscopic" deficiencies—misprints, abuse of capitals, turned letters, misuse of the dash—but they have very rarely spoken out on certain vital principles of cataloguing which closely concern the public. I refer to the *matter* contained in catalogues, the proper representation of important authors and subjects; the characterization or explanation of misleading and obscure titles; and due regard to accuracy of entry. I have little hesitation in stating that not a single lending library catalogue issued during the past twenty years will pass a close scrutiny on any of these points. I have before me various catalogues issued during 1893-4, every one being compiled on the lines of a wholesale grocer's price-list, and no more likely to aid the public with regard to the subject-matter of books than if they were devoted to an inventory of drugs. It is true that most of the books in the libraries are *named* in these catalogues, but not one tries to instruct readers in what the books are about. For example, what can an ordinary reader make of such entries under authors' names as :—

Lamont. Seasons with the sea-horses;
or
Warburton. Crescent and the cross?

Does the former refer to a bathing machine proprietor, or to a tour round the music halls with a performing walrus? Again, how very few, if any catalogues give information about the subject-matter of important novels, or even their proper sequence when part of a series? Look at the extraordinary and indiscriminate muddle of entries usually found in alphabetical order only under such names as Balzac, Cooper, Dickens, Dumas, Scott, Trollope, &c. Although a librarian may know that Lytton's *Harold* is an historical novel, probably not one per cent. of his readers does. In the catalogue of a free library in a large west of England city, issued only a short time ago, I find Le Sage's *Gil Blas* under Smollett as the author! This kind of ignorance of elementary literature prevails to a very great extent, and, with the utter lack of serious effort to assist readers in public libraries to understand what books are about, is the sort of thing which requires exposure in a journal like *THE LIBRARY*. But not on the lines of past attempts, which took almost a personal form by naming individual library catalogues. My proposal is that *THE LIBRARY* should publish lists of new catalogues giving such bibliographical details as may prove valuable as a record, and that comments on the whole batch be added, which could be made to embody all kinds of suggestions for improvement and references to defects, without singling out any library or individual. No librarian with the progress of the profession at heart could possibly object to such a course, which I am confident would have beneficial results both to librarianship and the public.

W. A.

A British Library Bureau.

WE are pleased to hear that a Library Bureau will shortly be opened at 21, Bloomsbury Street, near the British Museum. Five or six years ago we strongly urged that an attempt should be made to establish a British Library Bureau, and we endeavoured to enlist support among the members of the Library Association, but as necessary funds could not be guaranteed nothing came of our efforts at the time.

If conducted on proper lines, as we have every reason to believe it will be—with Mr. Cedric Chivers as manager—there can be no doubt the Bureau will prove of great value to the library world.

Library Association Record.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.

THE members of the Association are invited by the Rt. Hon. the Lord Mayor to meet in the Mansion House, London, on Thursday, October 18, 1894, at 8 p.m., when a paper will be read by Mr. Charles Welch, Librarian to the Corporation of London :—

“THE PUBLIC LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN LONDON: A REVIEW OF ITS PROGRESS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ITS CONSOLIDATION AND EXTENSION.”

Richard Garnett, Esq., LL.D., Ex-president of the Association, will take the chair. Members and their friends who intend to be present are requested to send in their names to the Hon. Sec. of the Association.